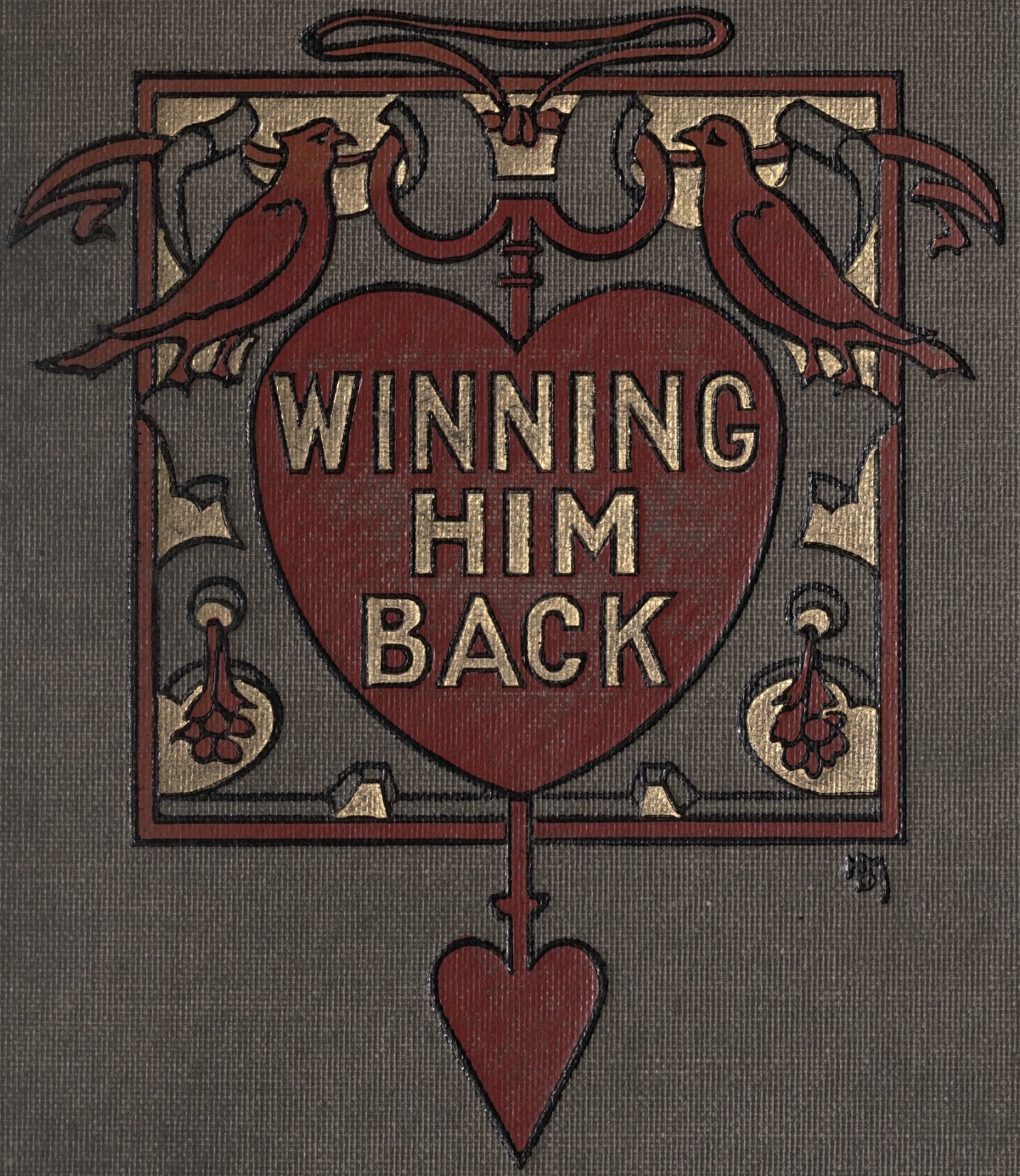

ANITA VIVANTI CHARTRES

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WINNING HIM BACK

Grace.

Winning Him Back

BY

ANITA VIVANTI CHARTRES

Author of "The Hunt for Happiness"

ILLUSTRATED BY

C. B. CURRIER

1904

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PREFACE

Here is no ponderous problem to be solved, no world-old question to be answered, no lofty purpose to be pursued—except the problem and question and purpose of amusing folk. In presenting Grace and Fifine and Tom and Reggie and some others, including the Brat, we trust that we introduce to the reader unwitting wearers of the cap and bells who are also human beings, "even as you and I." And if these same unconscious children of the motley and kindred of yours and mine will but make an hour the lighter and the brighter for you—why, then we shall have succeeded.

Wherefore, you can safely wish success to us—to us of the cap and bells. For what man will not wish for his own amusement?

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Friendship is constant in all other things,
Save in the office and affairs of love:
Therefore, all hearts in love use their own tongues;
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent.

—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

WINNING HIM BACK

CHAPTER I

MÉNAGE

"NOTHING ever happens," said Grace. "Things happen in newspapers and in Paris and in Conan Doyle, but not to one's self; not when one has a decent income." And she looked reproachfully at her husband, who was sipping his black coffee with a stolid and comfortable countenance.

"That is because you are married," chirped Fifine, rolling her French r's in her throat in a soft, pigeon-like way, as she dangled a cherry by its stalk, just above her pretty lips,

and made little snaps at it. "What can happen to one after that?—except in the modern plav and French novels. Whv did you do it?"

"Ah, why did I?" sighed Grace, still looking at her husband, with her head on one side and an expression of wonder and self-commiseration in her eyes; "why did I?"

"Because you were in love with me," said Mr. Carrington, placidly.

"I believe I was," said Grace, with an air of great surprise.

"So you are now," said her husband, cracking a walnut; "heels over head in love with me."

In the silence of utter amazement which followed, Fifine's laughter trilled out, youngly, and the Brat, too, laughed. The

Brat—Grace's sister—who was eight years old and wore her hair in two little, tight pigtails, which were stiff and funny to look at, laughed, shrilly and long, out of pure lightness of heart.

Grace was very angry. She turned to the Brat, and said:

"Leave the room, miss."

"But I haven't done anything," said the Brat, with that quick transition from wild laughter to whimpers so well known to the child soul.

"I told you to leave the room," said Grace, irrelevantly.

The Brat got up, pushing her chair back with a great deal of noise, and turning her pigtails sulkily to the table.

"I think it is a shame," she said, when she

got to the door. "And all," she added, with a loud sob, "because I have no mother." With this deadly parting shaft, she left the room, slamming the door behind her.

A short silence followed. Then Mr. Carrington laughed, loudly and heartily, and Fifine giggled; but Grace was very stern.

"I do not see anything to laugh at. You made me treat the child cruelly. Now, if I go after her with some cake, she will be unmanageable for a week; and, if I leave her to cry her heart out, I shall feel like a murderess."

"Let us compromise," said Mr. Carrington. "*I* will take her the cake." He rose, and, taking many sweets with him, left the room.

"I hate him," said Grace to Fifine.

"The Brat."

"Yes," said Fifine, with quiet, downcast lids; "of course."

"Why 'of course'?" snapped Grace. "I don't see any 'of course', except that he is my husband and that it is bad form to care about one's husband."

"Yes," said Fifine.

"And," continued Grace, aggressively, "for that matter, he is much nicer than the average husband—much nicer than any husband *you* are ever likely to get."

"Yes," said Fifine.

"He has curly hair, and he is twenty-seven, and his eyes are beautiful."

"They are," said Fifine.

Grace shot a quick glance across at her friend. Then she smiled, and Fifine smiled. And they both got up and sat on a low, soft

couch in a corner with their arms around each other's waists.

"You darling!" said Grace.

"You sweet!" said Fifine, kissing her.

"I am very unhappy," said Grace.

"I know you are, poor love," said Fifine.

"You see how he treats me," continued Grace; "how infamously he treats me! how he says just the things that make me miserable! Fancy his knowing that I am in love with him! Fancy his being so sure of it that he throws it into my very face!"

"It is serious," said the little French girl. "What has made him so sure of you? Have you told him that you love him—actually told him?"

"Occasionally," admitted Grace.

"Occasionally!" sneered her friend.

"Do you mean often? Yes, you do mean often. *Grand Dieu!*"—and she took Grace by the shoulders and peered into her face—"I believe you are always telling him so; always telling him that you love him, and not leaving him anything to guess at or to tremble about. Ah, fatal! fatal!"

And Fifine's little hands slipped, helpless and bejeweled, into her lap.

Grace looked guilty and miserable. "I have tried to be a good wife——" she began, meekly.

But Fifine interrupted her, starting up from her seat and walking about, with rustling skirts and foreign gestures.

"'Good'! 'good'! You always were 'good'. In school, Gracie, we used to call you 'Gracious Goodness' for short; well, not

for short. But anyhow," she added, vaguely, " if you haven't learned enough to know that men don't want good wives, you ought to go back to school again."

" How do you know so much about what men want? You're not married," said Grace, crossly.

" That's why I know all about it," quoth Fifine, and Grace did not dare to argue.

" What shall I do? " she said, weakly.

" My dear, you must win him back! "

" Win him back! " gasped Grace. " Why, that is dreadful."

" Not at all, not at all. It is exciting; it is great fun," said Fifine, nodding.

" But I mean," said Grace, " it is dreadful that one should have to do it."

" One always has to win a man back after

"'My dear, you must win him back!'"

one has married him," said Fifine. "Men are built that way."

Grace sat pensive, raising troubled eyebrows. "Win—him—back! It is not," she mused, "that I dislike the idea; it sounds interesting. But how does one do it?"

"Gracie," said Fifine, with glowing eyes and hand uplifted, "you must do it by keeping up the *Houp-là*."

"The what?" exclaimed Grace.

"The *Houp-là*," whispered Fifine, mysteriously.

"Hush!" she added, as Mr. Carrington's voice was heard outside. "I will tell you later on."

Grace sat still, looking bewildered and sweet, as her husband came in, holding the Brat by the hand. The Brat immediately

pretended to cry, and tried to look small and shrunken and pathetic.

"Here is a good little girl," began Mr. Carrington, at which touching description of herself the Brat set up a loud and sudden wail; "a good little girl, who is coming to be forgiven. Ask pardon, youngster," he said to the forlorn little figure by his side, and took his hand away from her.

The Brat went up to Grace, slowly, with her toes turned in, sobbing a little and rubbing her eyes with a fist that held some candy.

"Please forgive me," she mumbled.

Grace took hold of the warm little wrist.

"Will you never do it again?" she asked, earnestly.

"Do what again?" said the Brat.

There was silence. Grace had forgotten

what the Brat had done. Mr. Carrington coughed and looked out of the window, and Fifine turned her face away.

"Do what again?" repeated the Brat, scenting her advantage and making the most of it.

"I don't know," said Grace, guiltily. "But, whatever it was, don't do it again."

At which the Brat giggled, because she had a sense of humor. And Grace laughed as she kissed the little, sticky face.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUP-LÀ

At noon the following day, Fifine, pink and buoyant, looking like a rose slightly powdered with veloutine, entered Grace's boudoir, with rustling skirts and trailing perfumes.

"*Bonjour, ma mie!*"

"Well," said Grace, dejectedly, "I have been trying to keep up the *Houp-là*, but as I don't know what it is, I do not suppose I have done it."

Fifine laughed. She kissed Grace lightly on the top of the head, and sat down in an armchair, unpinning her little fly-away bon-

net and opening the ruffles around her throat.

"My dear Gracie," she said, "did it ever occur to you that no one at school ever spoke about my mother?"

"*Bong Dew!*" exclaimed Grace, moved to French by this exordium.

Fifine continued:

"No; everybody spoke about the Count de La Corderie, my father, but we always skipped or skimmed over the countess, my mother. That is because she was a circus girl, a dear little circus girl, with fluffy skirts, who perched on the backs of fat, white horses, and leaped through paper rings, and jabbed the clown's face with her jeweled riding-whip. She was very pretty and very clever and very funny; and, although she was the kind of

mother people would call 'undesirable', I wish, oh, I wish"—and there was a break in the little pigeon-like voice—"that she were not dead!"

"*Bong Dew!*" said Grace once more, deeply moved.

"Grace, if you say that again, I shall hit you," said Fifine. "It is dreadful; it is not French."

"Very well," said Grace. "Go on, dear."

"The count, my father, fell in love with her because of the funny little way in which she used to cry '*Houp-là*' just before turning a somersault on the galloping horse, or while she leaped through the paper rings. She had a treble voice like a child's, and my father used to say that it went right through him and made his heart leap into his throat, every time

he heard the little, shrill cry. After she was married, she never allowed him to fall out of love with her. And she told me she did it—by 'keeping up the *Houp-là*'."

"But what did she mean?" began Grace.

"My dear, she meant a number of things, of vague and subtle things, difficult to name. 'The *Houp-là*,' she used to say to me, 'is to married life what the sparkle is to champagne; nothing definite—empty air, indeed—but how essential! Always, Fifine, my child, when you have a husband, remember to keep up the *Houp-là*.'"

"I suppose it is all very lucid to you," sighed Grace; "but I do not see anything that applies to me, or to Tom. And Tom was perfectly heartless this morning as he went out," she continued. "When I looked out

of the window after him, he only just turned around once to wave his hand—and *not* when he got to the corner!"

"Now, then," said Fifine, folding her hands in a businesslike way, "to-morrow do not go to the window at all. If he mentions the fact, say, laughing sweetly: 'Dear! dear! did I forget? How careless of me!' And be light and sunny and nonchalant. And henceforward, *ma chérie,* keep a little shadow of mystery drawn over your soul, and let your eyes be dreamy under drooping lids. Trail about the rooms in clinging gowns and undefined perfumes. Adopt fads; insist upon having your rooms filled with gardenias, when they are out of season; faint away at the sight of a certain shade of mauve. Then spring surprises upon him. Be sudden; be

extraordinary; be unexpected. Do things! Pack up a powder-puff and a silk petticoat, and let him find you with a cab at the door, going away forever! Take poison one day. Be shot at by a frenzied lover the next. Adore him with the passion of a Spanish tigress to-day; ignore his existence to-morrow. All this, with a few other things, my dear Gracie, is what I call keeping up the *Houp-là*."

"It sounds dreadfully wearing," sighed Grace.

"Oh, well, of course, if you are satisfied to be like every other wretched wife, do it in your own way," said Fifine, rising.

"No, no! Don't go away," cried Grace. Then, clasping her hands, she said: "But are

you sure?—sure that this is the right way to—to win him back? It sounds so agitating! I thought that by being gentle and sweet-tempered and loving, that by being always the same to him——"

"You miserable!" cried Fifine, wildly, "don't you know that a man never wants sameness? Why, you must be different every time he sees you!"

"Are you sure?" repeated Grace.

"Sure? Of course, I am sure. Have I not tried it on Reginald? Have I not tried everything on Reginald?"

"Who is Reginald?" asked Grace, bewildered, sitting down again.

"My dear, I have not told you," said Fifine, dabbing her face carefully with a little powder-puff taken from her pocket, "because

things are still a little—uncertain. He is an Englishman, you know; and Englishmen never know their own minds."

"Don't they?" said Grace.

"No, they don't," snapped Fifine. "And, if you are going to contradict me, I might as well go home."

"Oh, Fifine, I did not contradict you. Kiss me! And I love you!" Kiss! "And you are sweet!" Kiss, kiss, kiss! "And you are so exciting and interesting!"

Fifine was mollified. "Well, I was telling you about Reginald. My dear, he is an angel! A tall, gentlemanly angel, with a tawny mustache and a drawl like a hero in one of 'The Duchess's' novels. He pronounces his r's like w's and is always 'dweadfully bored', because he is so supe-

rior, you know, and he writes things, essays and things, on something!" she ended, hazily.

"How nice!" said Grace, propitiatingly.

"Well, my dear, you should see me keeping up the *Houp-là* with Reginald! And that is nothing to what I shall do when I have married him. I shall not be one of those benighted Anglo-Saxon wives, who still believe in being good to their husbands, and I shall manage him in French, not in English. I shall be strange, I shall be unwholesome, I shall be unexpected, I shall be impossible. And he will adore me."

"Oh, Fifine, to think that you are engaged, and that you have never told me!" exclaimed Grace.

"Well, I am not exactly engaged. I—he is one of those slow, stolid Englishmen, who take a year or two to make up their minds about a thing——"

"Perhaps, darling," Grace ventured, tentatively, "with a man like that, a little less *Houp-là*——"

Fifine cast a glance of withering scorn at her friend. "We will not speak about him any more," she said.

And no amount of coaxing, or luncheon, or delicate flattery, would move her.

"I will help you with your affairs, Grace, if you wish me to, but I will manage mine in my own way."

So they returned to Mr. Carrington and his misdeeds. Fifine decided that the first thing to do was to look through all his pockets.

This they did, methodically and thoroughly, Grace getting "a turn" every time her hand found a folded paper.

"I feel very mean," she said, as she put back into a coat-pocket a bill for a diamond heart and chain that he had given her on her last birthday. "These clothes look so—so helpless, you know, poor things;" and, when Fifine was not looking, she kissed an old brown coat as she hung it up. Fifine was sniffing at a silk handkerchief, and held it out to Grace.

"Is this your perfume?"

"Yes," said Grace.

"Oh, all right," said Fifine, rather aggrieved.

They were sitting on the hearth-rug, turning Tom's evening-suit pockets inside out,

when the door opened stealthily, and the Brat put her head in.

"Aha!" she cried, derisively, "prying, are you? I'll tell Tom that you are going through his pockets. Prying!"

"Brat, darling, come here," said Grace, with a bland smile. "I have something to show you."

The Brat stuck out a pink and rigid tongue.

"Well, then, you shall not see it," and Grace hid one closed hand behind her back.

"What is it, anyhow?" asked the Brat, and came forward.

"Bend down and you shall see," said Grace, and the Brat bent down.

Grace grasped one of the pigtails and pulled it hard. The Brat shrieked, loudly.

"'Aha!" she cried, derisively, 'prying, are you? I'll tell Tom that you are going through his pockets.'"

"Promise you won't tell? Swear that you won't? Never? Honor bright?"

"Honor bright!" squealed the child, and Grace released her. Making a horrible face at them both, the Brat left the room.

"She will tell," whispered Grace. But Fifine, with many winks and nods, pointing to the open door, spoke in a loud voice as follows:

"Have you noticed, Grace, how pretty that child is growing? She really has such beautiful, beautiful eyes!" Then she was convulsed with silent laughter.

"Yes," Grace answered, as soon as she could control her voice, "and she is such a dear, noble child, too." Wild and soundless mirth on the part of Fifine. "You know," continued Grace, at the top of her voice,

"she has such a sense of honor! She will never tell; she has promised us that she won't, and she always, always keeps her word."

"I don't think!" remarked the Brat, leering evilly around the open door. "And, if you have any more soft soap for me, why don't you call me in and give it to me, instead of shouting it at me through the door?"

The Brat had to be propitiated with candy and a promise to be shown anything interesting that might be found in Tom's pockets.

Something was found, but it was not shown to the Brat. It was a thing which Fifine, with her very throaty French r's, called a "p-r-roof," and Grace's gentle head was bent over it with many tears. A bill of fare, a French bill of fare, full of naughty things to eat and drink—for two!

"But might he not have been with another man?" Grace had ventured, hesitantly.

"Nonsense, Gracie!" said Fifine. "Don't you know there is the greatest difference in the world between a man's bill of fare and a woman's? Look at this," and she ran over the incriminating list. "Would two men have ordered such a collection of dreadful things—Martini cocktails, caviare, *huîtres, bisque d'écrevisses, foie gras au truffes, homard au diable*—my dear, my dear, this is a most immoral bill of fare. There was a woman here, I tell you—a woman! And," she added, mysteriously, "probably a blonde."

There was a fresh burst of indignation from Grace.

"Come, come! We must face it," said

Fifine, with a comfortable sense of heroism. "Now, when was it? There is no date here—when was he in Paris?"

"We were there twice," sobbed Grace. "Once on our h-h-honeymoon and once—— Fifine!" she cried, suddenly, "you don't think that, while we were actually on our h-honeymoon, he was taking creatures—blonde creatures—to dinner?"

"No," said Fifine, looking wise; "I don't think so. It must have been the other time."

"That was last summer. Oh, Tom! Tom! Tom!"

"Gracie, my poor darling," cooed Fifine, "I am desolated for you. Now, forget everything except that you have to win him back."

Grace would have preferred leaving him

forever, but Fifine, who knew life and understood men, pointed out that he then would surely go back to the woman of the bill of fare.

So Grace decided that she would stay with him and win him back.

CHAPTER III

WINNING HIM BACK

LITTLE did Mr. Carrington know what was going on in his household, in the days that followed.

Grace had resolved that she would be a stranger to him, and adopted that attitude immediately on the day of the discovery of the bill of fare. But he came home in a very good humor, and did all the talking himself, and never even noticed that she was being a stranger to him.

This was aggravated by the fact that he told two funny stories at table, and she laughed at them, because she could not help it.

She left off being a stranger to him, and determined to be dreamy, morbid, and unwholesome. So she filled the house with undefined perfume and tried to faint at certain shades of mauve.

When Tom came into the atmosphere redolent of pastilles, *foin coupé, bergamot,* and *ylang ylang,* he said, lighting his cigar, hurriedly, "Phew! You have had those wretched old maids, the Harrisons, up here again for tea. I smell them." And, before Grace could answer, "It is a sure sign of middle-aged hysteria, this soaking one's self in odors. Open up, Gracie, and let us have some fresh air."

With Fifine, Grace practiced fainting until she ached all over; and they determined that

she should be found already " fainted," when Tom came in.

The certain shades of mauve were some dress samples of *crêpe de chine,* which she had her tailor send to her on approval. They were lying loose on the table, and she arranged herself limply on the floor when she heard Tom's key in the door downstairs.

But the Brat, who had been peeping, came in and tickled her until she shrieked; so she had to get up and race around the table in order to catch and slap the Brat.

" I don't know what to do," she said, dejectedly, to Fifine, who called next day to hear results. " I don't seem to have done anything. He certainly has not noticed any-

thing, and I don't seem to have won him back a bit."

"Will you try to poison yourself?" asked Fifine, cheerily. "You don't really take anything, of course. You lie in a darkened room and are very pale, with an empty bottle of arsenic tossed on the floor beside you."

"I cannot be pale when I want to," said Grace, pettishly.

"Oh, silly!" said Fifine. "Lanoline, and powder over it—that sticks and is beautiful."

Grace was unconvinced. "And then, oughtn't I to show signs of sickness?" she said.

So they set aside the poisoning.

"I have done all these things successfully with Reginald," remarked Fifine, "because,

you see, he does not live in the house. He just comes in and sees me; he is terribly moved and shaken; and then I wave my hand weakly, and say, 'Go! go! go!' as I fall back, unconscious. And he goes."

"I dare say he is very glad to go," said Grace, whose temper had been soured by recent failures.

This occasioned a coolness, but they soon made friends again, and returned to their plans.

"You must be shot at by a frenzied lover," said Fifine. "That is infallible. You will see."

Grace was skeptical and inclined to scoff.

"You first take an old bodice," explained Fifine, "the bodice of a dress that you don't

care about. And you shoot it through the sleeve. See?"

"No, I don't see," said Grace.

"Then," said Fifine, warming to her subject, "you take a piece of mustard-plaster or porous-plaster—which do you prefer, porous-plaster or mustard-plaster?"

"I don't care," sighed Grace.

"Well, you put the piece of mustard-plaster, cut long, on your arm. When you take it off again the skin is sore and red, and there is where the bullet grazed past you! Do you understand now? Oh, that is very French, very exciting."

Grace shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course," continued Fifine; "you refuse to divulge the man's name. But you will see how excited and anxious and adoring

your Tom will be. On his knees, he will implore you to tell the wretch's name—that he may kill him!"

Grace was touched.

"I will do it," she said, reluctantly. "But it is against my better judgment."

They found an old black bodice, and they took Tom's revolver from his writing-table, and went down into the yard to do the shooting. The housemaid was up-stairs, out of hearing, the laundry was empty, and Grace sent Kate, the cook, out on a hurried errand.

They were alone with the bodice and the revolver. Fifine proposed that Grace should hold the garment—well away from herself—while she, Fifine, shot at the sleeve. Grace refused, and suggested laying the bodice on the lawn and shooting down on it.

"I don't quite know what a bullet will do," said Fifine; "it might jump back at us, if we shoot on the ground."

Finally, they pinned the bodice to the wooden fence that separated their yard from the neighbor's, and fastened the left sleeve straight out against the boards.

"Now, Grace, you stand just a little away, and shoot at it," said Fifine.

"No, dear," said Grace; "you do it—I know you want to."

"I can't shoot, unless I hold my ears," said Fifine. "I hate the noise so!"

"Well, you shoot," said Grace, "and I'll hold your ears."

And so it was arranged. After a great deal of stepping nearer to and farther from the wall, with Grace holding her hands over

Fifine's ears, they decided on three paces away from the fence.

"Don't hold my ears so tight," said Fifine. Grace loosened her hold.

"Oh, now I can hear everything," said Fifine, impatiently. "Hold tighter!"

"How pale you are!" said Grace, bending forward and looking at her.

"So are you," snapped Fifine.

"Goodness! Here's the cook coming back!" said Grace. "Hurry up and shoot."

Fifine hurried up and shot. Grace shrieked, and Fifine dropped the revolver. They never knew how it happened that the yard was suddenly full of people, and that there were two policemen holding the cook, who was struggling and shouting and kicking. The negro servant from the other side of the

fence had come in, and was accusing the cook of already having tried to murder her three or four times by throwing poison and carbolic acid over the fence at her, all of which the cook convulsively denied.

Grace said she would explain to the policeman, and there was a profound silence while she explained. She said that it was not the cook, but Fifine, who had done the shooting, and that it was really on account of her (Grace's) husband that it had all occurred, because in order to win him back——

At this point the policeman took hold of Grace with one hand and of Fifine with the other, and said to the policeman who was holding the cook: "Bring them all along to the police-station."

Only by Fifine's great presence of mind

"Fifine hurried up and shot. Grace shrieked, and Fifine dropped the revolver."

were they saved. She was small and ingenuous, as she looked up at the officer who held her, and deliberately winked at him. She said softly: "Take us into the house, and I'll explain—satisfactorily." With her free hand she had dived into her pocket for a purse that she now held carelessly before her, and it was fat and full.

They were taken inside, and the policemen got forty dollars and went away, after having told the fair culprits to behave themselves in the future.

The two girls wept hysterically in each other's arms, and the cook left without notice, after getting very drunk and abusive.

Grace and Fifine went down, late in the afternoon, and unpinned the bodice from the fence.

"Did you hit it?" said Grace, as Fifine examined the garment.

"No," said Fifine; "but the bullet did go through the fence, so it wasn't such a bad shot after all."

CHAPTER IV

IN QUARANTINE

DEAREST FIFINE:

Do not come to the house. Poor, sweet Brat has the measles. We are very unhappy, and I am exceedingly anxious. She is so good and gentle that I am afraid she is going to die. Oh, if she were to die! And I have so often been unkind to her! She talks about her mother in a low, weak voice; and as poor, dear mama died when she was only four months old, she—the Brat, I mean—cannot really remember her, and I am dreadfully afraid that it may be a call, or a sign.

I wept bitterly and begged her not to; and I was greatly comforted when she asked me

whether I would give her my diamond sunburst, because it showed that she was still taking an interest in earthly things. Of course, I shall not give her the sunburst.

Tom is most unkind. When I asked him to sit in the dark room and hold her hand while I had dinner, and to come down afterward and have dinner by himself, he said, "Bosh!" and other cruel things. Besides, Fifine, I have reason to believe that the Woman of the Bill of Fare is living in his office-building, down-town! What reason, you will ask? Listen! He said yesterday that he was going back to his office in the evening, to make up some arrears of work. It immediately flashed upon me that it was that creature, and that the office and the arrears were a blind. So I followed him,

closely veiled, in a cab. He went down in a car, and, my dear, he *did* go to the office! Of course, she lives there and is near him all day. I am unspeakably miserable!

What is good for mucilage in the hair? The poor, darling Brat has been arranging her scrap-book, and had the gum-bottle on her pillow. When I came in, she sank back exhausted, and all the gum poured out on her head. She looks dreadful. We dare not have her shampooed. She is very sweet about it, and does not seem to care, poor little angel, but she frequently asks me to kiss her on her forehead, and, what with the measles and the mucilage, it is very unpleasant for me.

My love to you, dearest, and my kind regards to your dear father.

GRACE.

MY DARLING GRACIE:

I should say alcohol. How dreadful about the creature in the office! I should go down and see her and speak to her. Make yourself very pretty. You might put on a little rouge, and the large, white hat. If she is there, you can crush her. If your suspicions are unfounded, it will delight your husband to see you—men love a ray of sunshine in their dingy, dreary offices, in the midst of a hard day's work. When I marry Reginald, I shall always go to his office, rustling in in airy toilettes and being a ray of sunshine to him.

Do not fret about the measles. I had diphtheria once, which is much worse.

Your loving

FIFINE.

MY DEAR FIFINE:

I wish you had not told me about the ray of sunshine, and I wish I had not put on the large, white hat. Besides, that rouge looked dreadful in the daylight. I saw myself in a glass on the elevated train, and I looked positively purple. I have been very much insulted down-town. When I told the clerk in the outer office that I wished to see Mr. Carrington, he grinned and said the gentleman was busy. When I told him I was his wife, he said something that sounded like "nit," and a horrid little boy, sitting in a corner, laughed. He finally blew through a tube, and said:

"A lady wants to see you;" and in answer to something inaudible, said: "I don't know."

Tom came out in his shirt-sleeves, and

seemed quite startled when he saw me, and asked me what on earth had happened. I could have sworn he had the creature inside his private office, and I asked him who was with him. "Why, a couple of lawyers and another man," he said, crossly. I did not believe him. I insisted upon seeing for myself. I pushed past him and quickly went into the inner room. Some horrid men that were there stared most impertinently, and when I went out again I heard them laugh. Tom was exceedingly rude, and I swept out of the place much ruffled. I did not feel as if I had been a ray of sunshine. Then a man in the elevator stepped on my dress and tore a large piece of the frilling off. I had to pin it up in the hall down-stairs, which was crowded with men, and two tough young fel-

lows made remarks about my petticoats and my shoes, and also about my hat. They said, "Where did you get that hat?" to a tune of some kind. I reached home very sick and upset, and so far forgot myself as to speak rudely to the poor, sick child, when she asked for some marsh-mallows for her throat. She wept, and has spoken about mother again. I wish we were all dead.

GRACE.

DEAR FIFINE:

You might have written to me. As soon as the Brat is well, or rather is tired of pretending to be sick, for she is shamming most of the time, I shall leave Tom forever. All is over between us.

To-day, Sunday, after he had been reading

his vulgar newspapers all the morning, I said bitterly: "I shall go out for a walk."

He said: "All right, dear!"

I went to the door, and said: "Good-bye." Do you know what he answered? He answered:

"Good-bye." Actually!

I said: "You are very insulting."

He said: "Why?" and seemed quite astonished.

I said: "When a woman stands at the door and says good-bye, she does not mean you to answer good-bye. She means you to exclaim: 'No, don't go!'" Then I burst into tears.

My dear, he took me in his arms and kissed me, but he was laughing! He laughed and laughed, long and loud, in his vulgar, horrid way; so I came up-stairs to write to you

and tell you that all is over between Tom and myself. He does not love me, and everybody knows that marriage without love is immoral. I shall go and live with Aunt Eugenia—the one you see here sometimes, with those awful bonnets. Or, I could give lessons—young women alone in the world always give lessons. I hear Tom coming up-stairs. He will be sorry—very sorry—when he is left alone with the Brat, who has such horrid manners at table and always eats more than is good for her.

Poor Tom! Poor Brat! How unhappy they will be!

Good-bye! good-bye!

Your miserable

GRACE.

CHAPTER V

THE RUBY RING

"THIS is my last suggestion," said Fifine, who had hurried around to see her friend. "I lay awake all night, thinking it out—it is perfect! What you want is to make him jealous, is it not?"

"I do not know what I want," said Grace, "nor why I want it, nor how I am going to get it."

"Oh, that is only a frame of mind," said Fifine, cheerfully. "Now listen to me. This is a great idea, and, by carrying it out carefully, you are, at last, sure to win him back."

"Any deaths, or policemen, or being rays of sunshine in it?" asked Grace.

"No, dear," replied Fifine. "It is simply this. In order to make Tom jealous, you must have another man who adores you. If he adores you, he sends you presents, flowers, letters, jewels. Well, you get a man to send you a priceless gem——"

"Fifine," said Grace, "I have not a man who will send me a priceless gem."

"Of course not," said Fifine. "But this is what you do. You go to a jeweler; you select a ring; you pay and take it on approval. Then you send it to yourself, with a bunch of flowers and a love-letter. Your husband finds all. He makes a scene of jealousy. You win him back. Then you return the ring to the jeweler, who refunds you the money. There you are!"

Grace was thoughtful for a few moments. Then she said:

"I think this is the best thing you have hit on yet."

And Fifine replied, happily:

"I do not know what can have been the matter with me that I did not think of it before."

They discussed the details. Grace had sixty dollars, and Fifine knew a jeweler, not far off. They went out, hurriedly.

"I should like to do it to-day," said Grace. "Tom was particularly hard and unconcerned this morning. He ate a huge breakfast. I think it is so heartless of a man to eat a great deal! And how he sleeps! He goes to sleep on the slightest provocation. I cannot leave him alone, or not speak to him for

ten minutes, without being sure that he goes to sleep."

"That is horrid," said Fifine; and they walked a little faster.

At the jeweler's, Fifine asked a pale young man for Mr. Rosenstein, and Mr. Rosenstein came from the back of the store, rubbing suave hands and smiling engaging smiles.

To him Fifine explained:

"We wish to look at some rings—handsome rings—what one would call priceless gems."

"It must not cost more than sixty dollars," added Grace; but Rosenstein's benign head was turned away, and his obliging back was bent over the show-cases in the window.

"You are inclined to be swayed by phrases, Fifine," said Grace to her friend; "phrases

one reads in novels, such as ' a priceless gem ', and ' being a stranger ' to a person, and being ' a ray of sunshine ', and all that. It is really very misleading and never turns out right."

But Rosenstein had returned, and was showing them a diamond ring at two thousand dollars, an emerald ring at eighteen hundred dollars, and a pearl-and-diamond ring at only four hundred dollars.

"We want something cheaper," said Grace; "much cheaper."

He looked at the two ladies a moment, then went to the end of the store and brought back a ring—some small diamonds around a large ruby.

"That's pretty," said Fifine.

"And what a wonderful ruby," said Grace; "so dark and rich!"

"Vahnderful! I should say," agreed Rosenstein, with a smile that brought his nose down over his teeth and made his beard stick out.

"How much?" said Grace.

"Only two hahndred and feefty dahlars," said Rosenstein.

But Fifine turned to Grace:

"*Laisse-moi faire.*" Then, turning to Rosenstein: "Nonsense, Mr. Rosenstein. You ask two hundred and fifty, but you mean two, and you would take a hundred and fifty, and you are going to get a hundred. Of which we will give you sixty on account."

"Ach! vaht a vahnderful calculator!" exclaimed Rosenstein, clasping ecstatic hands. "Vaht a beesiness voman! Vaht I gif

to haf such a beesiness voman in my beesiness!"

But Fifine was unmoved by flattery, and refused to give more than a hundred dollars for the ring.

"Ach, mein Gott!" cried Rosenstein, shrilly; "dat ruby alone is vorth two hahndred dahlars!"

However, when Fifine had walked twice to the door, and Grace had spoken in a stage-whisper about going back to see that other ring they showed in the other store, Rosenstein, with a chastened countenance, put the ring into a little blue-velvet box, and accepted the sixty dollars on account.

He took Grace's address and her promise to pay the forty dollars, or return the ring, the next morning. The two friends went

home in a pleasant flutter of excitement, the ring reposing in Fifine's little black-velvet reticule.

"Oh, we forgot the flowers!" exclaimed Fifine.

"And we have barely time to write the letter before Tom gets home," added Grace.

"I'll run and order the flowers. Hold my satchel," said Fifine, handing her the little bag. "The ring is in it. You go up-stairs and write the letter yourself; and don't be afraid of making it passionate," she added.

"Oh, Fifine! What shall I say? It seems so silly to write to one's self."

"Say, 'My adored Gracie, this little ruby ring is only a wretched token—' and that kind of thing, you know. And mind you disguise your handwriting, and don't use your own

letter-paper. And you might sign it, 'Your Slave,' which is appropriate and vague."

Fifine was gone, in a flutter of light skirts and buoyant curls.

Grace entered her house, carrying the satchel with the ring in it, nervously, and repeating to herself, "My adored Gracie, this little ruby ring is only a wretched token—this wretched ruby ring is only a little token——"

In her desk she found some plain letter-paper, and used it all up in writing, "My adored Gracie," in different handwritings on every sheet. Thoroughly disheartened, she determined to wait for Fifine. Meanwhile, she opened the little bag, and took the ring out. In the bag there were some other things, which she peeped at—a dainty, jeweled scent-bottle, two prescriptions for hair-washes,

and a visiting-card, which she had not time to read, as she hurriedly stuffed the things back just before Fifine came in.

"Now help me to write this letter," she said, taking the large bunch of roses from Fifine and kissing her on the cheek.

But Fifine was "desolated." "*Ma toute chérie,* I have an appointment with Reginald to take afternoon tea at Rector's at four, and it is now nearly half-past five. He is certainly waiting for me—I have trained him well—but I never like to make him wait *more* than an hour and forty minutes!"

With many parting recommendations, on the landing, as to the wording of the letter and the attitude to adopt in regard to Tom's scene of jealousy, Fifine left.

Grace returned to the sitting-room, uneasy

and excited. She saw a visiting-card lying on the floor, and picked it up. "Mr. R. B. Wilkins, 22 Madison Square," she mused. "I wonder who he is. I must have stolen this from Fifine. Well," and she tossed the card upon the table, "I don't suppose she will miss it. And now for this horrible love-letter."

But she did not write it. The soft afternoon light shone in through the windows, warmed to pink and cooled again into light, gentle gray; and she still sat before the sheets of note-paper with, "My adored Gracie," scrawled on them, staring at the large bunch of roses and the little case with the ring.

"I cannot do it!" she exclaimed at last, crumpling up the sheets. "It is an insane French notion of Fifine's!" And, hearing

Tom's footsteps on the stairs, she hurriedly threw the papers away, and turned to face her husband, with a sweet, open smile.

He kissed her, and glanced over her fair head at the table.

"Whom are the flowers from?" he asked, patting her cheek.

"From—from Fifine," said Grace.

"Why, what makes her send you flowers?" said Tom, lightly, taking the roses up and smelling them. The little case lay blue and conspicuous on the table. Grace flushed scarlet.

"She did not send them," she stammered; "she—she went out for them; I mean, she brought them—yes," ended Grace, suddenly finding her husband's eyes fixed inquiringly on her.

"Why, Grace! What are you blushing about?" asked Tom.

"I'm not," said Grace, with a stiff smile.

"You look as if you were trying to tell a fib."

Grace laughed, nervously, and backed away toward the table. She stood between it and Tom, looking up at her husband, with a petrified and propitiating smile.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked. "What is the matter?" And, as she did not answer immediately, he forced her to one side, and looked at the table.

Grace's hand shot out toward the little blue box, but Tom caught her wrist, and held it.

"Why, what——?"

"Oh, don't," said Grace, wildly, clutching

at the box; "don't. I am not ready yet—I mean—oh, you're hurting my hand!"

Tom let her hand go at once, and opened the jewel-case.

"The deuce!" he said. "Whose is this? Fifine's?"

"No," said Grace, promptly.

"Yours?"

Grace nodded, carelessly. She was unprepared, and did not know what to say.

"Indeed!" said her husband. "New, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Grace. Then she added precipitately: "Why, no; I have had it ever so long."

"Have you?" said Tom again, and he was rather pale about the nose and lips.

"Gracie," he continued, after a moment,

"what are you telling me falsehoods for? Did you buy the thing?"

"I!" exclaimed Grace, and swallowed twice, with dry lips; "buy it! Why, how silly! Why should I buy it?"

"I did not suppose you did," said Tom. "Who gave it to you?" He asked the question very quietly, not looking at her.

"Nobody; really, Tom—nobody at all. I—I——"

She stopped, following Tom's gaze, which was resting on a little card, lying face downward on the table. She saw him take the card and read it. Then he raised his eyes, dark with anger and astonishment, to hers.

"Who is this?" he said. "Who is R. B. Wilkins?"

"I don't know," said Grace.

"You don't know?" cried Tom, stepping close to her; "you don't know? Here is a man who sends you flowers and jewelry, with his card, and you say you don't know him!"

Like lightning, it flashed upon Grace that she was doing it! actually doing it! She was in the midst of it, before she had known that it had begun. She was winning him back; she was keeping up the *Houp-là*. Everything was as it should be; and this was the scene of jealousy. The faintest of smiles crept over her face.

"Will you answer me?" said Tom. "What are you laughing at? Who is this Wilkins, and how does he dare to send you a ring?"

He was very near to her, and his voice was harsh and hoarse.

"Oh, don't, Tom! don't! You frighten me," she said.

"Will you answer me?" he cried. "Where have you met this man?"

"Nowhere! nowhere! I don't know him," she said, weakly.

Her husband put his hands into his pockets.

"Ah, you don't know him!" he observed, sarcastically. "At least, you will admit having seen him?"

She felt that she must admit this, if she was to keep up the fiction at all; so she said that she had seen him—just seen him.

"Ah, you have! How often?" inquired her husband, blandly.

She said, hesitatingly, "Once or twice."

"Ah, once or twice! And will you tell

me, madame," roared Tom, "how you account for your conduct in allowing a man whom you have seen once or twice to make you presents of jewelry?"

She could not account for it.

She had to answer innumerable questions, and she had to answer them quickly, before she had made up her mind what to say.

Had this man been to the house?—to his, Tom's, house, sneaking around when he was out? No, he had not. She swore it; she went on her knees and swore it, and began to feel very frightened.

Where had she met him? When had she spoken to him? Never! She had never spoken to him! She had just happened to—to—to—to see him. *Where* had she seen him? She did not know; she could not re-

member. Out—just in the street—she meant just by chance, looking out of the window.

So Tom came to the conclusion that she had been conducting a vulgar flirtation from the window, and, declaring that she ought to be ashamed of herself, he went out to tell Mr. Wilkins, of 22 Madison Square, what he thought of him.

When Grace heard the door close, she flew down-stairs, and called him back.

"Oh, Tom, don't," she cried; "you must not. It is all nonsense!" And then, hysterically, between laughter and tears, she added: "Why, the man does not know me; he does not even know who I am."

"Do you mean to say," cried Tom, angrily, "that the fellow does not know you are my wife?"

"No, no!" cried Grace, wildly; "he has not the faintest idea of it."

"Well, the sooner he finds out, the better," said Tom, as he re-entered the house, slammed the door, and went up-stairs.

Grace sat down limply in the hall, and thought things over. She could imagine Fifine, under the circumstances, going up-stairs and putting on an appropriate gown—something snaky and sinuous; doing her hair mysteriously in heavy *bandeaux à la* Paul Verlaine, or Duse, or Maeterlinck, or something —Grace's ideas were somewhat vague.

So she went up-stairs to dress for the part of the wicked, but beautiful, deceiver.

Meanwhile, her husband was in the sitting-room, packing up the ring and the flowers in

a piece of newspaper, to send back to Mr. Wilkins.

"Damn Mr. Wilkins!" he was saying to himself, as he put one of his wife's visiting-cards into the parcel. "Confound his cheek! I'll let him know that Mrs. Thomas Carrington does not accept presents from him. I'll teach this damned Wilkins a lesson!"

He gave the parcel to a servant, with instructions to take it to 22 Madison Square, and leave it there—no answer.

Then he went down to dinner, somewhat relieved. He was not cross to Grace. She looked very pretty in a startling gown and strange coiffure, with contrastingly timid behavior. He was amazed by what had occurred, but he thought it best not to be cross to her.

Meanwhile, at 22 Madison Square, Mr. R. B. Wilkins came in, and found a parcel waiting for him. It contained a lady's visiting-card, some flowers, and a ring.

"By Jove!" said Mr. Wilkins, "another conquest! I wonder what she is like. I'll go and call on her this evening."

"'By Jove!' said Mr. Wilkins, 'another conquest!'"

CHAPTER VI

THE ROSE AND THE RING

He went. Tall and impeccable, in lavender kid gloves, the duplicate crescent of his golden mustache divinely arcuated, he presented himself and his visiting-card at Mr. Carrington's house that evening, at half-past eight o'clock.

Mr. Carrington had gone out to his club, "for an hour." Mrs. Carrington was in the Brat's room, listening to the Brat's prayers. The Brat was very particular about her prayers. She prayed for many things and people—for all the governesses she had ever had; for all the dogs and cats and canaries

she had ever owned; for people she met in the street, and for people she heard other people talk about. And, when she was particularly religious and aggravating, she prayed for every one of her school-teachers and school-mates, calling them by name and making things last very long indeed.

She insisted that Grace should remain on her knees during the entire function and say amen at the end of every prayer.

"And please God bless Emily Jones, and Katie Jones, and Mary Riker, and Madge Van Orden, and the other little Van Orden girl, whose name I have forgotten, but who has red hair, and Baby Griggs, and Cecily Martin, even though she did draw the man in the moon smoking a pipe on my copy-book which I had to show to Miss Courtney, and

she said that if I ever had the audacity to present such a copy-book again——"

"Go on with your prayers," said Grace, from her knees near the bed, raising a flushed face from her hands, "and don't be irrelevant."

"Amen," quickly said the Brat, who wanted to lie down and think out something horrible to do to Cecily Martin.

"Amen," said Grace, rising from her knees, and bending over to kiss the child.

Collins, the house-maid, appeared at the door with a card in her hand. "A gentleman to see you, ma'am; Mr. Wilkins, if you please."

Grace stood aghast for a moment. Then, with a little gasp of relief, she told Collins to let him wait in the drawing-room. She

hastened to her room, and glanced at herself in the long mirror. She was sorry that she had the snaky dress and the symbolistic coiffure; but, as she really did look very pretty and odd, she determined not to make any change. She would glide into the presence of Mr. Wilkins, and, pale but composed, get the ring back from him, telling him quietly that it had been sent by mistake.

She got as far as the gliding in, but she was neither pale nor composed when the gentleman in the drawing-room, after staring at her with bated breath and an expression of ineffable tenderness and admiration, stepped forward with both hands outstretched, and uttered:

"Ah, beauteous one!"

Grace was thunderstruck. "Are—are—

you Mr. Wilkins?" she stammered, with a very red face.

"Oh, will you not call me Weggie?" said the gentleman, moving close to her and grasping one of her hands. As he did so, Grace in the mirror caught sight of Collins, passing through the hall and glancing into the room.

"Merciful Heavens!" she faltered, as she dragged her hand from Mr. Wilkins's clasp.

But he was undeterred. He took her hand again, and, bending down close to her face, asked her not to "shwink" from him, and insisted upon her sitting down on the sofa and telling him how it all came about.

She said "Sir!" repeatedly and indignantly, but he paid not the slightest attention, and was very gentle and firm, saying:

"Nevah mind! I understand. I will not huwwy you," until she felt that she was going to be hysterical.

So they sat on the sofa, and Mr. Wilkins held her hand, and asked her questions.

"Tell me all," he said; "tell it to me in your own way."

But he did not give her a chance to say anything, for he continued: "Shall I help you to tell me? Was it not my last volume of poems, 'The Laurel and the Wose', that cwept into your heart and made it thwob for me? Was it not?"

Grace, speechless and infuriated, tried to wriggle her hand away from his. "Sir!" she began again.

"S-sh!" he said, with maddening gentleness. "Don't, dearwest! *Not* the poems,

you say? Then you were at my last lecture, 'On the Fastidiousness of Beauty and the Beauty of Fastidiousness'! Ah," and he cast his handsome eyes up to the ceiling, "I felt that I was penetwating the sensitive soul of Woman that day! I felt it!"

"Will you please," began Grace, swallowing a lump in her throat, "will you please—I shall ring the bell," she ended, faintly.

"What a shwinking sweet!" said Mr. Wilkins, laying his disengaged hand over hers. And there, on his little finger, shone Rosenstein's ruby ring.

"That ring!" burst out Grace. "I want that ring back!"

Mr. Wilkins raised deep, reproachful eyes to hers.

"Nevah!" he exclaimed in a low voice;

"nevah! I tweasure this token, this unmistakable token of your affection, as I tweasure my life. Your woses I cawwy here," and he unfastened his coat, showing two crumpled roses, from the bunch that Fifine had bought, pinned to his waistcoat. "This little wuby wing I shall wear until bweath ceases!"

Grace looked at him with hatred growing large and bitter in her heart. This man, this horrible man, who sat near her, holding her hand, wearing her ring, not letting her speak, insisting that she loved him, was costing her sixty dollars and to-morrow would cost her forty dollars more. She would have to pay Rosenstein those forty dollars, and she would have made a present of a ring to this insulting, this insufferable person!

She wrenched her hand away, and, in an agony of mortification, with the tears starting to her eyes, cried: "You sha'n't! I want the ring back. I don't know you. I don't want to know you! I am miserable and ashamed!"

Here she burst into tears, and stood, small and pathetic, in her snaky dress and symbolistic coiffure, before him.

He was touched. He stood up and put his hand around her shoulders, in a kindly and consoling manner.

"You funny little girl," he said, "you mustn't cwy. I understand you; I understand you so well! These things are always happening to me, always!" And he paused, gazing at her with benevolent compassion. "I know how you feel about it. You did it

under the impulse of iwesistible emotion, and now that I am here you feel shy and unhappy. But you will get over that. Believe me, sweet one, that I am deeply appweciative, and that I would not wound your twembling heart for worlds—not for worlds!"

Quivering and indignant, Grace drew herself up.

"My *husband*, sir," she began, "I have a *husband* who——"

"I know, I know. You need not explain," interrupted Mr. Wilkins. "The old stowy! I have seen so much of it! Husband, howwid old bwute, I suppose, neglects charming wife. Charming wife weads my poems, sees me, hears me speak to the tendewest fibers of her delicate soul, is impwessed, is pene-

twated, is thwilled!—sends me a wose and a wuby wing—what could be pwettier, what could be sweeter, what could be tendewer?"

"Go away! go away!" cried Grace. "Don't speak to me any more; go away!" And she rang the bell.

"I will wespect your wishes," said Mr. Wilkins, with gentle gravity; "I understand you." And, taking his perfect cane and his irreproachable hat, he bowed over her hand, and kissed it.

"I—I will write and explain," said Grace, feeling suddenly in the wrong.

"I know you will wite," said the gentleman, as he went toward the door. "My shwinking little bird, farewell. Fear nothing; I shall see you to-morrow."

L of C.

Collins, rigid and correct, with proper, downcast eyelids, stood in the hall, and showed the gentleman out.

"Collins! My cloak and hat—quick!" gasped Grace.

Collins did not answer.

"Did you hear me?" cried Grace.

"Yes, ma'am," said Collins, with thin compressed lips and acid looks, as she went upstairs.

Grace took a cab, and drove to Fifine's house. Fifine came out of her bedroom, with loosened hair and many exclamations of surprise.

"I was just going to bed, dear," she said. "What has happened?"

"Fifine," panted Grace, "you know a man called Wilkins?—a conceited, horrible, inso-

lent puppy—an unspeakably impertinent and idiotic creature!"

"You will kindly leave the house," said Fifine, with flashing eyes.

"What?" exclaimed Grace.

"Leave this house," repeated Fifine. "Go away at once, and never speak to me again!"

"Why, what have I done?" sobbed Grace, utterly broken. "What is it? What have I said?"

"You know what you have said," cried Fifine, shrilly; "and am I to stand here and listen to you? and let you vituperate Reginald, my Reginald? Go away, and never come here again!"

Drooping and dejected, Grace let herself

into the house, and as she was about to go upstairs, she heard Collins talking to the cook and the scullery-maid in the hall below.

"Yes," said Collins; "he was a blarsted Englishman. And they sat in the drawing-room all night, holding hands."

"Nonsense," said the cook.

"You don't say," said the scullery-maid.

"Then she cried and carried on awful," continued Collins, "until he promised that he'd come again to-morrow, and told her she might write to him every day."

"Disgustin'!" said the cook.

"Sickenin'!" said the scullery-maid.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN OF THE BILL OF FARE

GRACE arose next morning, a wreck. A rapid mental review of the situation made her groan and cover her face with her hands. Tom was frigid to her; the servants despised her; Fifine had quarreled with her; Wilkins had made love to her—Wilkins was Reginald; she owed forty dollars to Rosenstein; and nobody would listen to any explanations.

Even if they had listened, she would not have known how to begin to explain.

She had to explain things to everybody. How could she tell Fifine that "her Regi-

nald" had held her hands all the evening and called her "shwinking sweet," and "bird," and things, without arousing Fifine's horrid French temper, which—she remembered from their schooldays—always meant a great deal of clawing and scratching and screaming?—let alone having to explain how she had rummaged through Fifine's satchel, and used her friend's visiting-cards for her own purposes.

How was she to explain to Tom that she had told any number of falsehoods, about seeing Wilkins from the window, and all that?—let alone the humiliation of having to confess that nobody had sent her jewels, or flowers, or anything.

How was she to explain to the servants that it really did not mean anything, if she had sat

in the drawing-room and wept, with a strange man's arms around her shoulders?

So she sat down and wished everybody were dead.

Tom, who had had a hurried and uncomfortable breakfast, alone with the Brat—she had spilt everything over the tablecloth and had been generally unpleasant—found Grace sitting dejectedly in her dressing-room, and, being a large, comfortable man, his heart smote him.

"What's the matter, Gracie?" he asked, although he knew, or thought he knew, exactly what the matter was. She was penitent. She was longing to weep in his arms, to tell him that she had never in her heart wronged him, or cared for Wilkins.

Grace raised a pale face and said:

"I want forty dollars."

"Oh!" said Tom, icily; and, with hardening countenance, he put the money on the table and left the room.

"Brute!" sobbed Grace. "Why did he not ask me what I wanted it for? I should have told him everything."

Unable to bear the strain any longer, she ran down-stairs, to call him back. But he had left the house; and, after weeping fifteen minutes at the window, Grace went up to her room again.

The money was gone. On the table lay a penciled note from the Brat.

"I have taken the money to take to school to show to Cecily Martin to make her sick. She thinks her old pa has all the money in the

world—she is so vulgar! I shall bring it home all right, except for some marsh-mallows.

Your affectionate sister."

Grace fell on her bed, and laughed the laugh of despair and of hysterics. Then she dressed and sat down to await events.

The first event was Wilkins, who arrived with a large box of Maillard's bon-bons, and insisted on sitting down-stairs in the drawing-room and waiting for her.

She said to herself: "I will tell him all, and get the ring back." So she was going down, when she heard Rosenstein's voice in the hall below.

"Mrs. Carrington? I must see her at vunce—on beesiness."

She heard Collins showing him into the drawing-room, and her heart beat faster as she faltered down the stairs. She was on the second landing, when she heard a key in the hall door, and, stopping, saw her husband come in. She thought he looked angry and suspicious.

Collins was loitering about the hall. "Oh, sir, I was just going up-stairs to tell madame that the gentleman was here," she said.

"What gentleman?" inquired Mr. Carrington.

"The gentleman what was here with madame all last evening," remarked the maid, with prim, pinched lips; "a Mr. Wilkins, as I believe, sir."

Tom turned and went straight to the draw-

ing-room. Grace leaned against the banisters, and felt faint.

On entering the room, Tom was confronted with Rosenstein's engaging bow and plausible beard. Wilkins remained seated on the sofa, holding the box of candy.

"I vished to see *Mrs.* Carrington," said Rosenstein, quickly; "I vished to see her, particularly."

"What for?" asked Tom.

"Oh, a leetle private matter," said Rosenstein. "She hat from me a ring yesterday, a ruby ring."

"Oh, *you* gave her the ring, did you?" said Tom, putting his hands in his pockets.

"I tit," said Rosenstein.

Tom looked him up and down with unutterable scorn. "Well, Mr. Wilkins," he

said—there was a slight perturbation on the sofa—"you got your ring back—and I am the lady's husband!"

Tom expected this declaration to produce a startling effect, but he was unprepared for the wild anger and amazement that spread over his interlocutor's countenance.

"Vaht? vaht?" stuttered Rosenstein. "I care not whose huspant you are. I got dat ring back, vaht you say? And vaht is Vilkins? eh, vaht? *Gott im Himmel!*"

"I say, Mr. Wilkins, that you are a cad and a blackguard, and that I am going to break your head."

Mr. Wilkins arose from the sofa. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I think there is some mistake."

"Vaht mistake?" blustered Rosenstein.

"Dis man try to cheat me. He ant his wife are tiefs. He call me Vilkins, and try to cheat me. There is the voman! there!" And Rosenstein pointed a bony and awful finger at the door, where Grace had appeared, and stood white and trembling.

"Silence!" roared Tom, and turned to Grace. "Is this the man you got the ring from, madame?"

"Does she deny, does she dare to deny, it?" questioned Rosenstein of his gods, wildly wringing his hands.

"Is this Wilkins?" continued Tom. "Answer me."

"No," faltered Grace; and Wilkins took another step forward.

"Will you allow me?" he said, with raised hand.

Rosenstein uttered a shrill cry, and pointed to Wilkins' finger. "Dere's de ring! dere's my ruby ring, vaht you owe me de balance on, and vaht you say you returned, you many tiefs!"

A moment of dead silence followed, as Tom's astonished eyes rested on Wilkins' little finger.

"Where did you get that from?" he asked; "and what are you doing here? Who are you?"

"My name—er—is Wilkins—er—and I——"

"Stop!" shouted Tom. "Then who is this?" and he pointed to Rosenstein, who was pulling quickly at his beard, in a frenzy of excitement.

"Oh, Tom, dear! Tom!" cried Grace.

"Wait a minute—let me explain. We are so mixed up!"

"You mix yourselfs up because you are tiefs, dat's vaht!" exclaimed Rosenstein. "You vant to steal de ring."

"What is he talking about?" said Tom. "Who is he? What are all these men doing in my house? Who gave you that ring, sir?" he said, turning angrily on Wilkins.

"Well—er——" said Wilkins, "I—er—wegwet to say that—er—this lady pwesented it to me. If," he added, with an increased drawl, and twirling his large mustache, "if this is a badgeah game you are playing on me, how much do you want, and let us have done with it!"

Tom was dumfounded. Rosenstein, who had never left off talking, here raised his voice

again: "You tiefs, dis is all a put-up jop to steal from me my ruby ring. I haf you all arrested."

The bell had rung, and Collins had shown in Fifine, who remained standing just within the door, listening, without any one of the excited party in the drawing-room having noticed her.

But Rosenstein's eager eye now lighted on Fifine, and he cried:

"Dere is de oder vomen, de oder crook, de oder tief!"

At these words Tom made a plunge forward, and seized Rosenstein by the collar.

"What do you mean?" he said, shaking him; "what do you mean?"

"I mean dat I haf you all arrested,"

croaked Rosenstein, "for stealing my goots and detaining my person vile I miss a sale. *Gott im Himmel,* I miss a sale!" he added, wildly, wringing his hands.

"What do you want?" roared Tom.

"I vahnt my ring back, or de balance of de money, dat's vaht I vahnt," he replied.

"Oh, Tom! pay him," sobbed Grace; "it is only forty dollars."

"Tree hahndred and feefty dahlars," shouted Rosenstein; "not one cent less, or I haf you all arrested. You, madame," he said to Grace, "for gifing avay my goots, and you all for keeping stolen goots, and for violence to my person."

"Is this your wing?" asked Wilkins, slowly awakening to the fact. "Why, take it—and get out!"

He threw the ring on the table. Rosenstein seized it, and held it up against the light. Then he placed it on the table again.

"I refuse," he said. "I haf missed de sale. And, besides"—a wicked grin crept over his face, his eyes gleamed, and his nose curved down over his mouth—"you haf changed de stone."

"What!" cried Grace and Wilkins together.

"Dat's vaht I say; you haf changed de stone," quoth Rosenstein, smiling complacently. "Dat's no ruby; dat's a piece of glass. Tree hahndred and feefty dahlars, or you all go to jail."

In vain did Grace mention the sixty dollars paid on account. Tom's indignant demands for enlightenment were unheeded; and, while

Fifine talked to everybody in excited French, Mr. Wilkins bought the ring for three hundred and fifty dollars.

"You haf a bargain," said the jeweler, as he folded the check and put it away in a greasy pocket-book; "a bargain, I say. De ruby alone—vaht?"

"Get out," said Wilkins.

Rosenstein hurried to the door. There he turned around, and, showing all his teeth, "De ruby alone," he said, "as a *vahnderful* imitation, is vorth——" but Wilkins put him outside, and shut the door.

When Wilkins turned around, Fifine was holding out to him his hat in one hand and the box of bon-bons in the other. Tom was speaking to Grace in a low voice, near the window.

"Is this yours?" Fifine asked, holding up the box of sweets.

"No, deahwest, it is yours," said Reginald. "And so is this, if you will do me the honor," and he slipped the ruby ring on her finger.

Fifine laughed. Then she tucked her arm under his, and walked him out of the room.

"But we have not said good-bye," Reginald suggested.

"Never mind; we can say good-bye when we come back," said she.

"Well, my deah Fifine, I—er—should like to make a clean bweast of something," said Reginald, when they were in the street. "I like making clean bweasts of things, don't you know."

"You angel!" said Fifine; "you nice, English angel. Go ahead!"

And he went ahead.

And she went with him, arm in arm—for all time.

In Mr. Carrington's house that afternoon, there were explanations.

"I hope, dear," said Tom, "that you will not win me back any more. It upsets things so!"

"Oh, Tom! Tom! It was all the fault of the Woman of the Bill of Fare."

"Of the who?" said Tom, with his hand to his head.

Grace went to her room, and fetched the *pièce d'accusation.*

"This—this is an immoral bill of fare," she sobbed. "Fifine said so."

And while Tom looked at it she continued:

"To think that, when you were in Paris last time, you should have been so bad, so—so—improper!"

"It was not last time; it was the time before," said Tom.

"What!" cried Grace, "on our h-honeymoon trip?"

"Yes, dear," said her husband. "The second day, I believe."

"Oh, Tom!" said Grace.

"A most immoral," began Tom, "a most improper——" but his wife's hand was over his mouth, and he could do nothing but kiss it.

She had laid her pretty, flushing face on his shoulder, and her arms were about his neck, when, raising her eyes, she saw the Brat standing in the doorway. The Brat was not jeering or making faces at her, so she knew

that something must be wrong, even before she noticed that the Brat's face was scratched and tear-stained.

"What is it, Brat, darling?" she asked, leaving her husband, and going to meet the child.

"Here's the change," said the Brat, drearily, holding out a two-dollar bill and four cents, in a very dirty hand, "from the forty dollars."

"Gracious!" said her sister. "What have you done with the rest?"

The Brat bellowed.

"Cecily Martin got it," she howled; "and three dollars' worth of marshmallows, and two nigger dolls, and all the other things I bought, and all the money—and everything."

She screamed very loudly, and would not be comforted.

"Never mind, darling," said Grace; "you shall have a lot more of everything. Don't cry."

"No, don't cry," said Tom.

They had a very happy dinner.

"I bet that Martin girl was sick, all the same," said the Brat. "And I did pull out a lot of her hideous hair," she added, taking a small paper parcel out of the front of her dress. "Here it is!"

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